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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 001157

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: SUSTAINING POST-RIGA MOMENTUM ON NATO
ACCESSION

REF: A. SKOPJE 1139

[B](#). SKOPJE 1120

[C](#). SKOPJE 1112

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CLASSIFIED BY: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#). (SBU) We are taking advantage of the positive post-Riga Summit mood here to press the GOM to step up NATO MAP-related reform implementation. Macedonia is making progress in some areas -- working on constructive government-opposition dialogue, promoting economic growth, and strengthening rule of law. It also is taking steps to address religious freedom and trafficking in persons challenges. We will use the next several weeks to work with the government to enhance and consolidate that progress, with the aim of giving Macedonia a needed boost as it begins the crucial run-up to a membership assessment in 2007, and a hoped-for membership invitation in [2](#)008. End Summary.

POST-RIGA AFTERGLOW AND NATO MAP

[2](#). (SBU) In the afterglow of the Riga Summit communique, which was greeted very positively by the government, public, and press (ref A), conditions are maximal for pressing the GOM to ramp up efforts to implement its NATO MAP-related reforms. During a December 4 meeting with Prime Minister Gruevski, the Ambassador stressed the importance of preserving and building upon Macedonia's reputation as a stable, multi-ethnic democracy in the Balkans. She noted that Macedonia has another eight months or so to complete the core requirements related to its NATO MAP, including continued efforts to forge a constructive political dialogue with the main opposition parties.

[3](#). (SBU) PM Gruevski readily accepted a second US-EU hosted "Leadership Meeting" of the main government and opposition party leaders to discuss the way forward on key legislative and policy priorities (ref B). He offered two government priorities (constitutional changes regarding the educational system and establishment of a ministry for information technology) for us to add to the agenda for the meeting, scheduled for December 13.

CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR NATO ISAF IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ
OPERATIONS

14. (SBU) The Ambassador thanked Gruevski for Macedonia's continued support for NATO ISAF efforts in Afghanistan and for its contributions to operations in Iraq. She noted the positive impact of Macedonia's recent decision to lift five of seven caveats on its forces supporting ISAF operations (ref C). Gruevski said he understood the importance of that decision, and that he looked forward to visiting Macedonia's soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan in April or May 2007.

MOVING AHEAD ON ECONOMIC CRITERIA, RULE OF LAW

15. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that Macedonia's economic indicators generally were positive, with a recent USG assessment concluding its sovereign and non-sovereign credit ratings should be raised a step or two. Recent successful prosecutions of organized crime cases, including a major trafficking in persons case, had demonstrated some strengthening of rule of law. The government still had a long road ahead in the fight against corruption; judges in corruption cases especially needed to demonstrate greater control of the judicial process. PM Gruevski agreed that Macedonian judges in some cases were politically influenced and did not behave in accordance with the law.

HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM LAW

16. (C) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for the Prime Minister's and Foreign Minister's recent efforts to lobby Macedonia's Orthodox Church leaders for a law on religious communities and groups that would provide maximum freedom for such groups to register and practice in the country. Gruevski replied that those discussions had been "tough." Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) Archbishop Stefan was "politically astute," he said; the other bishops in the MOC Synod were much less so and were opposed to a more liberal law. Nevertheless, Gruevski said he accepted the need for a

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tolerant religious freedom law as a "key element for NATO" membership. The government had prepared a new draft religious freedom law, which it would ask OSCE to review. If the new draft met OSCE/ODIHR standards, Gruevski would then review it with Macedonia's Islamic community leaders before going back to lobby the MOC.

TACKLING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

17. (SBU) The Ambassador pressed for more GOM focus on trafficking in persons (TIP) as another key NATO membership requirement. She urged PM Gruevski to include at the appropriate time in one of his public statements a recognition of the TIP problem in Macedonia and a strong commitment to combat it. Gruevski said he would immediately include a discussion point on TIP for that day's government session agenda. He also pledged to include a strong statement on TIP in one of his upcoming speeches on fighting organized crime.

18. (SBU) In addition to our efforts to get the government to focus more publicly on TIP, we have arranged a December 8 TIP digital video conference between State's G/TIP Office and GOM officials involved in combating TIP. The objective of that exercise (septel) is to discuss steps the government needs to take to prevent the country from falling to Tier II Watchlist for 2006, and to build a case for an eventual return from Tier II to a Tier I rating.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS, ACCELERATING DEFENSE REFORMS

19. (SBU) In a December 7 meeting with the Ambassador, President Crvenkovski said that the Riga Summit communique had been very well-received in Macedonia, and that the government was realistic about the work to be done in the

coming year. He had convened the National Security Council on December 3 to discuss post-Riga tasks ahead, and was pleased that both the government and opposition had shared a forward-looking perspective on what needed to be done. The MOD was planning to speed up implementation of defense reforms by six months, in order to complete remaining MAP-related reforms by June vice December 2007. One of the NSC members, a former Defense Minister, had made a forceful pitch for the importance of passing a religious freedom law that met international standards.

¶10. (C) Crvenkovski's key concern was that the Gruevski government is "spread too thin" and is not prioritizing NATO membership-related tasks. The President recently had told PM Gruevski that the government needed to focus on reforms and programs related to NATO and EU membership, including Ohrid Framework Agreement implementation, defense and judicial reforms, and fighting corruption. Crvenkovski told the Ambassador he felt part of the reason for the lack of government focus was a sense of overconfidence, fed by high poll numbers in its first 100 days "honeymoon period."

WORKING FOR POLITICAL BUY-IN FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

¶11. (SBU) Contacts in the Prime Minister's office have told us that Gruevski plans to ask the opposition eAlbanian party DUI and the opposition Social Democrats (SDSM) to nominate representatives to participate in the newly-formed Inter-Ministerial Committee for NATO Membership. The committee meets monthly to coordinate government efforts on NATO membership. The Social Democrats are likely to provide a candidate, and DUI has told us they will consider doing so. (NOTE: We have urged DUI to participate, since that would send a positive political signal and would be easy to justify to DUI's constituents as serving their interests in NATO membership.)

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) The positive climate fostered by the Riga Summit communique and President Bush's statement on NATO enlargement have provided us with important leverage to press the GOM to redouble and focus its attention on completing the NATO-related reforms necessary to make Macedonia a strong contender for a membership invitation. We will work with GOM contacts over the next several weeks, while the post-Riga "high" lasts, to enhance and consolidate the progress the

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country already has made, and to give it a needed boost before it sets off on the crucial run-up to a membership assessment in 2007, and a hoped-for invitation in 2008.
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